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ABSTRACT

The central and most common element in existing conceptualizations of communication competency is the concept of control, which suggests that competency is a function of the communicator's ability to exert influence over physical and social surroundings. This paper identifies six phases of the control process: goal specification, information acquisition, prediction making, strategy selection, strategy implementation, and environmental testing. A number of subphases within these general phases are also hypothesized. The paper contrasts this model of competency to several other views of competency, arguing that substantial ambiguity in explanations of communication competency arises from a tendency to supplement the control orientation with various components of value orientations, such as supportiveness, identity maintenance, empathy and perspective-taking, and self-disclosure. Needs for further research are noted, and a list of references is attached. (Author/RL)

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ISSUES IN THE EXPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

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Abstract

This paper examined the explication of communication competency. The most common and central element in most existing conceptualizations is the control orientation. This suggests that competency is a function of the communicator's ability to exert control over his or her physical and social surroundings. Unlike previous discussions, this paper sought to specify the phases of the control process. Six general phases were identified: 1) goal-specification; 2) information-acquisition; 3) prediction-making; 4) strategy selection; 5) strategy implementation; and 6) environmental testing. A number of subphases or dimensions of each more general phase were hypothesized.

This model of competency was then contrasted to several other views of competency in the current literature. It is argued that substantial ambiguity in the explication of competency has arisen from the tendency to supplement the control orientation with components based on various value orientations. Four commonly included components of existing conceptualizations were examined in order to illustrate this point: 1) rewardingness or supportiveness; 2) identity maintenance; 3) empathy and perspective-taking; and 4) self-disclosure.

ISSUES IN THE EXPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

Everyday conversation often contains references to communication competence or effectiveness. Statements such as "He is socially inept," or "I just don't seem to make many close friends" imply a competence evaluation. Similar, though more abstract, evaluations can be found in most introductory and advanced speech communication texts. Unfortunately, communication competency has often been dangerously akin to Pirsig's (1974) concept of "quality"-- something everyone can recognize but no one can define. Some treatments of the concept have had such a mystical tenor that one is almost tempted to label the area as "Zen and the Art of Communication Competency."

While not denying other modes of inquiry, the communication scientist requires a more thorough explication of the concept. The purpose of the present paper is to present a central focus or perspective for the explication of competency. Although the paper would not presume to present a complete explication, it will examine and evaluation several of the major themes in current explications of the concept. In doing so a number of conceptual linkages and boundaries between the various components of the competency notion will be drawn.

The Effectance or Control Orientation

The intellectual core of most conceptualizations of communication competence is the concept of effectance or control. Although it is explicitly recognized only rarely, this theme can be seen in many of the theoretical perspectives in contemporary social science.

In its essential form the effectance orientation begins with a recognition of persons' needs to effect or influence their environment in some

fashion. Psychological concepts such as optimal stimulation (Hebb & Thompson, 1954; Leuba, 1955) and exploratory behavior (Woodworth, 1958; White, 1959) implicitly presume that persons are not passive recipients of environmental events. Rather they are active participants who seek to influence their surroundings in specific ways.

A similar theme can also be seen in communication and social psychological perspectives. Exchange theory, for example, carries with it the assumption that participants have goals and seek to attain them. Exchange formulations presume that human interaction is basically manipulative (Wood, Weinstein & Parker, 1967).

It would also seem apparent that much of the persuasion and attitude change literature is concerned with strategies for controlling the actions or attitudes of others. Typologies of power and social influence (e.g., French & Raven, 1960; Etzioni, 1961; Kelman, 1961; Marwell & Schmitt, 1969) testify to the richness and variety of the control theme.

The dramaturgical perspective of Goffman (1959, 1961, 1969) and others also implicitly acknowledges this theme. If we view social interaction as theatre with actors playing and improvising performances, we can not assume that our "cast" works for nothing. Rather, these intricate performances are orchestrated for the fulfillment of personal goals and needs. Control over the situation will be a primary motive for the actor (Goffman, 1959).

Comparisons of these theoretical perspectives reveal several common assumptions. First, persons are not passive with regard to their physical or social environments. Second, persons appear to have a basic need or desire to effect their environment-- often beyond the fulfillment of primary needs (White, 1959). Third, this "effectance motivation" takes the form

of active control or manipulation of the physical and social situation. Finally, control behaviors are mobilized toward goal-achievement.

These observations would suggest that competency can be conceptualized in terms of the communicator's ability to specify and attain goals. This view is perhaps most succinctly stated by Miller and Steinberg (1975: 62):

. . . the basic function of all communication is to control the environment so as to realize certain physical, economic or social rewards from it.

It is worth emphasizing that the locus of competency in this formulation is solidly lodged in the actor's aims (Weinstein, 1969). The competent communicator is one who maximizes goal-attainment. This implies that others' evaluations of the communicator's sensitivity or effectiveness will not always be an adequate measure of competency.

One of the initial obstacles to a thorough explication of competency has been the strong negative connotations for control and manipulation. These terms are often associated with a lack of concern for the other, with coldness or cruelty. Two points might be made about such views. First, these concepts are value-free. As Weinstein (1969) observes, control is relative to the actor's purposes. We may wish to control others in order to exploit or help them. The therapist attempting to help his or her client is no less manipulative or controlling than the clever used car salesman. Differences may exist with respect to the nature of the goal, but not to the need for manipulation or control. Control simply implies that persons find some consequences of their communication more desirable than others and attempt to attain the more desirable outcomes (Miller & Steinberg, 1975).

Second, it should be noted that attempts at control are not unilateral. Control is not only something we do to others, it is something we do for and in collaboration with others. We not only attempt to control others, but we also are able to resist or aid in their attempts to control us. The negative connotation of the concept of control largely ignores its often joint or mutual qualities.

In general, the connotations so frequently attached to the control orientation add conceptually ambiguous dimensions to the concept of competency. A later section of the paper will examine the consequences of the often uncritical ~~mixing of~~ questions of fact with questions of value which is encouraged by these connotations.

Explicating the Control Orientation

In order for the control orientation to provide a heuristic perspective on communication competency, a more thorough examination of the process of control is necessary. This section attempts to identify the general process through which control is operationalized in on-going communication situations. Six generally sequential phases in the control process are hypothesized. Although they are not independent, they do represent recognizable features of an on-going process.

Goal Specification. The concept of goal is this perspective is very similar to Weinstein's (1969: 754-755) definition of an "interpersonal task:"

. . . that response or set of responses of alter which ego is attempting to elicit. Contained in the set are covert as well as overt tasks so that ego may be trying to get alter to think or feel something as well as do something. . . . It is assumed that in a given encounter, an actor has a set of interpersonal tasks, each having a theoretically specifiable reward for him.

It is assumed that persons make plans regarding their future activities (cf. Miller, Galanter & Pribram, 1960). These may be elaborate or sketchy. And although they are not always explicitly articulated, most people can report that some set of outcomes would be preferable to others. At least five relevant dimensions of the goal specification process can be identified: 1) awareness; 2) specificity; 3) duration; 4) mutuality; and 5) realism.

To suggest that communicators have goals and make plans is not necessarily to presume that they are always highly conscious of them. However, to presume that we only rarely specify or articulate our goals is problematic for the control orientation since it would preclude systematic evaluations of competence.

Although there is undoubtedly considerable variance in awareness, there are many situations in which persons are quite aware of their goals. Miller and Steinberg (1975) outline six such situations: 1) if the outcomes of the encounter are uncertain; 2) if it is important to one or more participants that a given outcome occur; 3) if participants are not highly skilled in selecting or applying available strategies; 4) if high levels of effort are required; 5) if the potential of negative outcomes is great; or 6) if one or more of the participants believe that they can be influential in attaining rewarding outcomes. Moreover, enhanced awareness can be a product of communication. Even when the communicator is relatively unaware of his or her goals at the outset, it is probable that there are any number of outcomes which would be immediately recognized as undesirable. Should one of these occur, the communicator will rapidly become aware of the failure to achieve the desired ends.

A second dimension along which the goal-specification phase varies is specificity. Persons can enter into a given encounter with either quite diffuse or quite specific goals in mind. A minimal goal is simply eliciting responses from others, but beyond this a considerable range of specificity still exists. It has been hypothesized that the more specifically one formulates goals, the more successful he or she is likely to be (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). If for no other reason, specificity would enhance the efficiency with which the communicator could acquire information and make strategy decisions.

The specificity dimension is conceptualized as independent of the awareness dimension. One may have a high awareness of rather diffuse goals or one may even have low awareness of quite specific goals. Specificity refers only to the level of elaboration in defining the goal. This need not necessarily be related with awareness.

Goals may also vary as to their duration. They may be realized in a given current encounter or they may require extended future interaction. When the goal is viewed as a relatively long-term one, the communicator must be much more concerned with the identity maintenance of the other. The perceived duration of the goal is also hypothesized to have an impact on the extent to which the communicator must acquire information about the other. In short-term goal situations, the communicator may require less information to make predictions about how to achieve his or her goal.

A fourth dimension along which the goal-specification phase varies is mutuality. This dimension refers to the level of perceived contingency in the goal. Jones and Gerard (1967) provide a useful typology of degrees of

contingency: 1) pseudocontingency-- the goals of the communicators are completely independent of one another; 2) asymmetrical contingency-- the goals of one communicator are dependent on the actions of another communicator, but not vice versa; 3) reactive contingency-- the goals of each communicator are completely determined by the preceding response of the other; and 4) mutual contingency-- the goals of each communicator are determined partly by the preceding responses of the other and partially by the individual's own plans or internal stimulation. As Jones and Gerard point out, these categories differentiate levels of self- and social-stimulation required for goal-attainment. Although the issue is largely unresearched, it is reasonable to presume that differences along this dimension would have an impact on the type and amount of information sought, the type of predictions made about the other, and the type of strategy selected.

A final dimension of the goal-specification process is realism. This continuum may be defined as the extent to which the communicator formulates his or her goals in terms of the probability of attainment. That is, some persons formulate their goals relatively independently, while others may define their goals more in terms of the on-going consequences of interaction. Variation along this dimension would presumably have an impact on the extent to which the individual continues to seek information and modify goals or strategies within an encounter.

In general it is hypothesized that persons will be more effective or competent when they are: 1) aware of their goals; 2) able to articulate their goals with a moderate to high level of specificity; and 3) able to account for their potential for success throughout the interaction. Moreover, later phases such as information acquisition and strategy selection

will vary in structure as a consequence of the perceived levels of duration and mutuality.

Information Acquisition. It is intuitively obvious that control attempts are based on information about the other. Communicative behavior directed toward gaining knowledge or understanding is not independent of attempts to gain control. Rather it is an identifiable phase of the overall control process. We don't gather information about others randomly. In fact, many of our information acquisition attempts are highly focused and quite deliberate. Information acquisition strategies such as asking third parties about the target person or self-disclosing in an attempt to get the target person to reveal similar information, for example, imply intent and perhaps even a certain level of deliberation on the user's part (cf. Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman & Miller, 1976; Berger, 1976). Moreover, it is assumed that information acquisition attempts are directed toward the achievement of the user's goals (Miller & Steinberg, 1975; Berger, 1976).

Berger, et al. (1976) have posited three levels of knowledge or information-- descriptive, predictive and explanatory. Descriptive information pertains to the current behavior, attitudes, characteristics or dispositions of the other. Information which yields inferences about future behavior, attitudes, characteristics or dispositions is at the predictive level. When information acquisition is directed toward the generation of a limited number of potential causal attributions for the other's behavior, the explanatory level is reached. In a later paper Berger (1976) hypothesizes that each successive level requires more complex cognitive operations and a greater expenditure of cognitive effort. To the extent that this is true, it would suggest that communicators may tailor their information acquisition

activities to the requirements of their goals. Many of our goals probably don't require information at the explanatory level. Routine sales transactions, for example, do not require any kind of general explanatory attributional framework for successful completion. In fact, attempts to gain understanding or insight into the salesperson at this deeper level may even hinder the transaction. On the other hand, when the goal is a long-term one or one which necessitates intimacy, the communicator will have greater information acquisition needs. Additionally, information acquisition activities may increase when the goal is ambiguously or incompletely specified or when the context is novel or ambiguous to one or more of the communicators. In each case the nature of the information acquisition process is partially dependent upon the dynamics of the overall control process.

At each of the three levels of information a second distinction can be drawn. This is the distinction between stimulus generalization and stimulus discrimination functions (cf. Miller & Steinberg, 1975). The former refers to attempts to acquire or apply information so as to isolate similarities between the current situation or other and previous situations and/or persons. The latter refers to the use of information to identify unique aspects of the other or situation. From the standpoint of predicting how the other will respond and selecting strategies for goal-attainment, each function would seem equally important. However, there are a number of individual difference factors which may mediate these functions. Highly authoritarian or dogmatic persons, for example, appear to make only a relatively small number of crude stimulus discriminations (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, 1950; Rokeach, 1960). A similar observation might be made about low cognitively complex individuals

(cf. Schroder, Driver & Streufert, 1967). Conversely, highly Machiavellian individuals are more likely to possess enhanced discrimination and generalization skills (Christie & Geis, 1968). These considerations suggest that the information acquisition phase will be dependent both on the nature of the goals and the individual characteristics of the communicator.

Prediction-Making. Information is actively used to make predictions (Berger, et al., 1976; Berger, 1976; Miller & Steinberg, 1975). Although closely associated with the information acquisition phase, prediction-making is not necessarily a simple extension of acquisition activities. Prediction-making implies cognitive activity beyond the simple collation of information. These activities can be categorized along the following five dimensions: 1) accuracy; 2) goal relevance; 3) temporal position; 4) level; and 5) confidence. The nature and implications of each dimension are outlined below:

The first and most obvious dimension of prediction-making activities is accuracy. Accuracy is most commonly conceptualized as the ability to correctly predict or assess the other's behavioral or internal states. Inaccuracy can arise from several sources such as: a) having insufficient information; b) having distorted or irrelevant information; or c) failing to account for contextual or personal changes occurring between the time information was acquired and the time it was organized to make a prediction.

The second dimension, goal relevance, refers to the impact of the goal on prediction-making activities. Different goals may demand rather different types of predictions. Although it is incomplete, a typology suggested by Jones and Thibaut (1958) is suggestive. These investigators examined differences in prediction-making across three general types of

interaction goals: a) value-maintenance goals-- in which the communicator is attempting to assess the other's attractiveness or reward qualities; b) causal-genetic goal sets-- in which the communicator is attempting to develop an understanding of the other's personality; and c) situation-matching goal sets-- in which the communicator is attempting to evaluate the appropriateness of the other's attitudes or behaviors. According to Jones and Thibaut the nature of prediction-making activities will vary as a function of which of the goal sets is relevant. Situation-matching sets, for example, imply predictions about the relationship between the other's actions or attitudes and group or cultural attitudes, values and norms. The predictive focus for value-maintenance sets is more self-directed and idiosyncratic; while the causal-genetic goal set implies a focus on the history and idiosyncratic qualities of the other. Thus, each goal set implies a somewhat different focus for prediction-making activities.

Predictions also vary according to their temporal position. Some predictions are made about the relationships among previously acquired pieces of information. Berger (1975) refers to these as retroactive attributions and suggests that they play a major role in developing explanations for the other's behavior. Other predictions are made about actions or dispositional states in the immediate future. Still other predictions pertain to actions in the more distant future. At this latter end of the temporal continuum predictions often have a contingent quality about them. That is, they predict responses to potential future behaviors of the communicator. Distinctions in prediction-making along this continuum are perhaps most easily seen in game situations. The chess player, for example, will attempt to organize knowledge of his opponent's previous moves into a prediction

regarding the opponent's overall strategy. He is also likely to make predictions about the opponent's moves in the immediate future as well as about how the opponent is likely to respond to his own moves in the future. Since each of these predictions will have a somewhat different informational base, the investigator must account for the temporal position of the predictions being made.

Prediction-making activities also vary along a fourth dimension which can be called level. Coorientation theory and Laing's (Laing, Phillipson & Lee, 1966) interpersonal perception approach provide the basis for conceptualizing this dimension. Laing and his associates delineate several levels of perceptions or predictions:

- Direct Perspective: What the communicator perceives about some issue, object or person, X.
- Metaperspective: What the communicator predicts the other perceives about X.
- Metametaperspective: What the communicator predicts the other predicts about the communicator's views of X.

Although Laing and his associates go on to examine even higher levels of perception and prediction, these are sufficient to make the point that each different level requires a somewhat different informational base and imposes a different test of accuracy. In general it is hypothesized that the amount and complexity of cognitive activity increases with level.

The final dimension along which we can assess prediction-making activities is confidence. The communicator's level of confidence in his or her predictions should influence the overall control process in several ways.

When confidence is low, for example, we would expect that the communicator

would increase his or her monitoring of incoming information, impose a more present-oriented temporal position on predictions, and perhaps even select a greater variety of strategies for consideration.

Although there is little research on the issue, several factors might be hypothesized as determinants of the communicator's level of confidence. One of these is the sheer amount of information upon which the prediction is based. In general an increasing function linking amount of information with the level of confidence is suggested. However, this function is probably not monotonic since there may be limits on the communicator's ability to process large amounts of data. Cronbach (1955), for example, discusses several statistical reasons why increased information can lead to decreased predictive accuracy. Presumably, these might also generate decreased confidence after a certain point. A second determinant of confidence is the level of information used. Explanatory information allows the communicator to derive specific predictions set within a broader causal framework and thus may inspire greater confidence than predictions made without such a base. A third determinant of confidence is the degree of consistency in the informational base. That is, the communicator's level of confidence in his or her predictions is likely to be lower when they are based on inconsistent or conflicting pieces of information about the other. An additional determinant of confidence may be the communicator's previous level of accuracy. If he or she has been inaccurate in previous predictions about the other, we would expect current levels of confidence to be lower.

Strategy Selection. The preceding phases all provide bases for the selection of a specific control strategy. Relatively little is known

about the strategy selection process. The persuasion literature has provided extensive information about strategies in public communication contexts. However, much of this is prescriptive-- it tells us more about what people ought to do than about what they actually do. More importantly, there is no analogous literature pertaining to interpersonal situations. The bulk of the existing literature in this area focuses on the development and testing of strategy typologies (e.g., Wood, Weinstein & Parker, 1967; Marwell & Schmitt, 1969; Miller, et. al, 1976). Efforts to isolate the personality and situational variables mediating strategy choices are relatively recent (Kaminski, McDermott & Boster, 1977; Boster, 1977). These studies suggest that persons are most likely to employ a criteria which is based on the positiveness of the strategy. Persons' initial strategy selections are based on an attempt to evoke positive behavioral and/or emotional responses. None of these studies, however, examine later strategy decisions. That is, little is known about secondary selection criteria employed when initial choices fail to achieve the desired outcomes. These studies also suggest the presence of significant individual differences in criteria and strategy selection-- although they do not specify the personality dimensions along which these differences occur.

In general we might speculate that competence in strategy choice is a function of two factors. The first of these is the size of the communicator's strategic repertoire. Assuming that persons encounter substantial variety in situations, it is probably fair to suggest that the competent communicator is one who has a large stock of strategies from which to choose. Such a person will have greater flexibility in adapting to changing relationships and contexts over time.

The second factor has to do with the ability to selectively apply various influence strategies. Persons who use the same strategies over and over are unlikely to be maximally successful (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). In fact such rigid interaction styles are often associated with the development of psychopathology (e.g., Haley, 1964; Murrell & Stachowiak, 1965; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967; Beels & Ferber, 1969).

Strategy Implementation. It is possible to reach this phase and still fail to achieve one's goals because of a lack of strategy implementation skills. The primary emphasis for the communication scientist is on skills of verbal encoding. The communicator must, of course, have the ability to use language effectively. This includes the ability to employ any specialized terms or jargons required by the audience or context. However, beyond saying that encoding should be clear, well organized and responsive to the audience, existing research provides scant explication of this phase. This is especially true if one moves from the context of public speaking to the more fluid context of interpersonal relationships. Relatively little is known about the factors influencing whether a message in this latter set of contexts is clear or well organized.

Environmental Testing. The final phase of the control process involves evaluating the effectiveness of strategies selected. Following Altman and Taylor (1973) it is suggested that communicators routinely "critique" their interactions in an attempt to determine the desirability of outcomes. The ability to make these evaluations will be a function of several factors. Some of these may be beyond the communicator's immediate control. It may be, for example, that the target person is unable or unwilling to provide feedback to the communicator. Other aspects of environmental testing, however,

are more fully determined by the actions of the communicator himself or herself. Many of these have to do with the outcome of the goal specification stage. The more specifically the goal was formulated, the less ambiguous is the test of effectiveness. Behavioral goals are probably more easily assessed than goals involving cognitive or affective states in the other. At least the general thrust of the behavioral objectives literature in education would suggest such a view. The communicator must also be sensitive to the timing of the evaluation. If the goal is long-term or if there is a delay between strategy implementation and effect, the communicator must be able to test the environment at the appropriate point. Finally, one might speculate that mutual or joint goals are more difficult to assess than individual goals. The former requires that the communicator test the behaviors, attitudes or dispositions of several parties, while the latter implies a much more restricted set of environmental tests.

Summary. Six general phases of the control process were identified: 1) goal-specification; 2) information acquisition; 3) prediction-making; 4) strategy selection; 5) strategy implementation; and 6) environmental testing. Unlike several previous conceptualizations of competency, this perspective views competence not as a characteristic of the communicator, but rather as a characteristic of the process by which the communicator interacts with his or her physical and social environment. Such a view implies that competence is learned. Much of this perspective is analogous to conceptualizations of social learning theory (e.g., Miller & Dollard, 1941; Bandura & Walters, 1963).

Although it has not been explicitly recognized, this conceptualization also implies a strong iterative quality in the control process-- similar in structure to the concept of a "TOTE" unit (Miller, Galanter & Pribram,

1960). Goal-attainment is viewed as the culmination of a series of control attempts.

Comparison with Other Perspectives on Competence

While the control orientation is implicit in many existing views of competence, it has not been consistently applied or explicated. One of the obstacles to such an explication has been the tendency to emphasize the goals of the competent communicator rather than the process by which those goals are achieved. To a great extent, competence thus becomes the degree to which the individual pursues the "right" or socially desirable goals with the most socially desirable set of strategies. Assessing competence becomes a dual question of assessing a set of facts (i.e., "Did the communicator achieve his or her goals?") and a set of values (i.e., "Were his or her goals appropriate, right or desirable?"). Even if the investigator can find some position from which he or she can defend a value orientation, considerable ambiguity may remain. This ambiguity arises from the difficulty and restrictiveness imposed by the need to simultaneously satisfy very different and often conflicting criteria. To illustrate this problem the remainder of the section examines four of the more common components found in existing views of competence. These are: 1) rewardingness or supportiveness; 2) identity maintenance; 3) empathy and perspective-taking; and 4) openness or self-disclosure. Obviously these are not the only factors in existing conceptualizations. However they are typical of the existing literature and are among the more common components across the existing perspectives.

Rewardingness and Supportiveness. Several views of competence suggest that the competent communicator is one who can effectively reward or support the other as a part of or in addition to his or her personal goals (e.g., Argyle, 1969; Wiemann, 1975; Pearce, 1976).

In many situations inclusion of this component is consistent with both effectiveness and value criteria. Where the goal has a relatively long duration, some minimal level of continuing support or reward to the other is probably necessary to preserve the relationship. A similar observation might be made about situations in which the communicator's goals are highly contingent upon or similar to the goals of the other.

However, it is possible to point to a number of common situations in which the inclusion of a reward or support component creates inconsistent effectiveness and value assessments. In highly ritualized communication transactions, for example, achieving one's goals may not require rewarding or supporting the other. To take the time to offer rewards or support to a salesperson may be competent from a value perspective, but may be irrelevant or even counterproductive from an effectiveness perspective. The interaction may be so brief that extensive rewards are not necessary to maintain it. Or, as in the case of a salesperson, the other's rewards may come from the communicator only indirectly. The communicator may possess enough power over the other that he or she can achieve desirable outcomes without extensive support of the other. In other situations the communicator's goal may actually be to discipline or punish the other. In each of these cases attempts to simultaneously apply both effectiveness and value criteria lead to ambiguity and contradiction.

Identity Maintenance. Closely associated with the previous component is the notion that competent communicators act in ways which maintain, support or confirm the identity of the other (cf. Goffman, 1959; Weinstein, 1966; Pearce, 1976). Again, however, there are any number of situations in which confirming the identity may be counterproductive from an effectiveness or control perspective. Interestingly, many of these situations occur in therapeutic settings. Vernon (1962), for example, suggests that the therapists' goals often require placing the patient in a paradoxical and disconfirming position. Haley (1963) contends that all of the various schools of therapy have one commonality-- that of placing the client in a paradoxical situation.

In fairness it should be noted that many situations do require confirmation of the other's identity. But to limit the conceptualization of competence to these situations implies an overly restricted range of application. Such a limitation is not easily justified either on grounds of effectiveness or a particular value orientation.

If the researcher attempts to operate from effectiveness and value perspectives simultaneously, even more difficult issues arise. At some point attempts at competency assessment are met with the ethical question of whether a competent communicator can pursue desirable ends by means of undesirable strategies.. My point is not that such questions are unanswerable or that they should not be asked. Rather, the issue at hand is whether or not they need to be answered in order to explicate a basic communication concept. Traditional scientific values such as clarity and parsimony would probably argue against explications which made such requirements.

Empathy and Perspective-Taking. Perhaps the most frequently hypothesized characteristic of the competent communicator is empathy (e.g., Foote & Cottrell, 1955; Bochner & Kelly, 1974; Delia & O'Keefe, 1975; Wiemann, 1975). Unfortunately, the concept of empathy has been so abused that its precise meaning is not always clear (Gunkle, 1963). It sometimes takes on almost mystical qualities. Images of empathy as "crawling inside another person's skin and seeing the world through his eyes" (Carkhuff, 1973) are of limited utility to the communication scientist.

Closely related is the role- or perspective-taking process. Some choose to define empathy as the ability to take the role of the other (e.g., Bochner & Kelly, 1974). Taking the role of the other requires an ability to move from ego-centered perceptions to the use of more other-oriented perceptual sets (Delia & O'Keefe, 1975). Developmental psychologists differ over how and where the distinction between ego-centric projection and "genuine empathy" is to be drawn (cf. Chandler, 1973; Shantz, 1975).

Although an incredible diversity of conceptualizations for these concepts can be found in the literature, the common element is almost all of these is the notion that empathy or perspective-taking involves the ability to accurately predict the behavioral or dispositional state of the other. Some definitions limit themselves to this element (e.g., Dymond, 1949). Most other treatments, however, add features to this basic aspect. Stotland, Sherman and Shaver (1971), for example, view empathy as a sort of affective mirroring in which the communicator actually shares the emotions of the other. Other investigators suggest that to be empathic one must not only be able to predict the responses of the other, but must

also communicate this understanding to the other (e.g., Pierce & Drawgow, 1969; Wiemann, 1975). As Miller and Steinberg (1975) point out, many of the conceptualizations of empathy append its predictive component with a component that calls for the provision of some reward such as confirmation for the other.

Several observations flow from a consideration of these concepts. First, empathy has a long history of conceptual ambiguity. Conceptualizations of perspective-taking also share some of this historical murkiness. As a result, it is questionable whether their use in the explication of communication competence yields much in terms of clarity and parsimony.

Second, investigators of competence rarely specify the object of empathy. That is, we are rarely given insight into what aspects of the other require an empathic response. In contrast, the control perspective outlined in the previous section suggests rather specific applications and boundaries for the prediction of the other's behaviors or dispositions.

Third, empathy is usually included in conceptualizations of competence without qualification. That is, empathy or perspective-taking is included as a positive value in and of itself. However, the unqualified inclusion of these concepts can create ambiguity. At a minimum the communicator must empathize with or predict only those aspects of the other which are relevant to goal-attainment. Moreover, there are many situations in which taking the role of the other can be awkward if not dysfunctional. The employer, for example, can not be overly concerned with understanding or sharing the feelings of an employee about to be fired. In fact, too great an attempt at empathy or perspective-taking may interfere with the employer's ability to achieve his or her goal. In short, the inclusion of these

concepts in the explication of competence on unqualified value or effectiveness criteria is overly ambiguous and restrictive.

Self-Disclosure. A final characteristic frequently attributed to the competent communicator is openness or self-disclosure (Argyris, 1965; Bochner & Kelly, 1974). Disclosure is often included implicitly in the more humanistic conceptualizations of competence and interpersonal communication (e.g., Rogers, 1961; Jourard, 1968; 1971). Again, however, the unqualified inclusion of this variable on value grounds creates contradiction and ambiguity for any sort of effectiveness or control criterion.

To be sure, disclosure is essential from both a value and a control perspective in many situations. The communicator may believe that the other will require personal information in order to properly reward him. In therapeutic and quasi-therapeutic settings disclosure may be rewarding in itself. On the other hand, there are many situations in which disclosure is inappropriate, if not counterproductive from the standpoint of effectiveness. Thibaut and Kelly (1959), for example, note that one is often more likely to achieve his or her goals when the other does not have extensive information.

The potential value/effectiveness contradiction is perhaps most easily seen in the case of deceptive communication. Disclosure implies a willingness to reveal and discuss one's own feelings (Bochner & Kelly, 1974). As a result the use of deceptive strategies would be viewed as a sign of incompetence in many of these existing perspectives. However, the widespread use of deceptive communication suggests that it does serve some positive function from the standpoint of effectiveness. Among the more commonly mentioned positive functions are efficiency, avoidance of negative sanctions and relational equilibrium (cf. Wolk & Henley, 1970; Knapp, Hart & Dennis, 1974).

Discussion

Conceptualizations of communication competency are abundant in the existing speech communication literature. Some are explicit, but most are assumed and implicit. The control orientation is the central theme in almost all of these. Competent communicators are those individuals who are successful in fulfilling their needs, maximizing rewards or attaining their goals. Attempts to explicate this basic definition, however, have either encountered or created two major obstacles.

The first of these has to do with a general failure to adequately specify the phases or antecedents of the actual control process. The reader is told that the competent communicator achieves his or her goals, but relatively little about how this is done. As a result, we are left with discussion which are incomplete at best and ambiguous at worst. The present paper has attempted to explore the necessary requirements of the control orientation. Six general phases were identified: 1) goal-specification; 2) information-acquisition; 3) prediction-making; 4) strategy selection; 5) strategy implementation; and 6) environmental testing. Although their actual content or structure may vary across situations, these general phases are present in all attempts to exert control through communication.

In addition to specifying these general dimensions of the control process, a number of subphases or dimensions were discussed within each phase. These were introduced in an attempt to account for the situational and relational diversity in control attempts. The approach taken here suggests that communication competence is a function of the communicator's ability to successfully control his or her environment. Competence is

not so much a quality of an individual as a quality of interaction or communication with the surrounding physical and social environment.

This implies that people can be competent in some situations and incompetent in others. Unlike most previous conceptualizations, the present paper views competence as an environmental response rather than an individual trait.

The second major obstacle facing the investigator has been the rather casual mixing of effectiveness and value perspectives. After outlining the basic control perspective, many previous investigators go on to add dimensions of competence which do not consistently or coherently flow from the control perspective itself. In many cases, these dimensions can not be defended on grounds of enhancing goal-attainment. Rewardingness, identity maintenance, empathy and self-disclosure were used as illustrations of this difficulty. I am not arguing that these factors have nothing to do with competence. Rather, they are relevant in some situations, but irrelevant in others. The argument is that these factors are most clearly and coherently viewed as strategic decisions instead of general characteristics of competency. That is, self-disclosure is not a trait of the competent communicator, but rather a strategic decision made by a communicator. Thus, the decision to disclose will be a sign of competency in some situations, but a sign of incompetency in others. In its discussion of the general phases of the control process the present paper attempts to explore the criteria by which such decisions are made.

Much remains to be done before a complete explication of competency can be offered. At several points the need for further research was noted.

A number of hypotheses were advanced in this paper. It is hoped that these will serve to direct and stimulate research in the area of communication competency.

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